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# THE NEW YORK LATIN LEAFLET

Entered at the Post Office in Brooklyn as second-class matter, October 29, 1900

25 Issues  
One-half of  
Every Subscription  
goes into the  
Scholarship Fund

VOL VI

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, APRIL 16, 1906

No 147

## LATIN CLUB NOTICE

EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE LATIN CLUB—MAY 19, 1906

Professor Kirby F Smith of Johns Hopkins University will address the club on a subject to be announced later at the Hotel Marlborough, Thirty-sixth street and Broadway, New York City. We shall sit down promptly at 12 M. Seats will be reserved for those holding tickets, others should be sure to notify "THE LATIN LEAFLET", 1050 Bergen street, Brooklyn, by postal card, if intending to be present. ATTEND TO THIS MATTER NOW.

Election of Officers for 1906-7 will take place at this meeting.

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## THE VALUE OF LATIN IN EARLY EDUCATION

[An address delivered before the New York Latin Club on February 17, 1906, by Professor Sidney G Ashmore.]

### In Two Parts—Part I

It is impossible to treat this subject in a single hour. If I were to set down all that comes to my mind about it, I should be obliged to fill full so many pages of manuscript that many meetings like the present one would be needed in which to give you the benefit or the boredom of the whole matter. I shall therefore confine myself to a single aspect of the subject, and that not the most attractive or inspiring. One of my friends living in Schenectady, with whom I was talking the other day on the point to which I now desire to call your attention, remarked to me that I was firing off a little gun where I might fire a big one. His idea was that so much might be said about the classics as culture studies—about their artistic qualities, their finished diction, their paternal relation to the modern literatures, that to be busy about a technical question regarding their value as a means of discipline or training was to neglect the higher for the lower, the broad for the narrow, the artistic and theoretical for the practical and material. But my friend had overlooked the fact that the attractions which the classics possessed for him had already been enlarged upon by many speakers and writers more able to do justice to the theme than I. Moreover, I hoped to bring forward something which, if not wholly new, was yet not altogether worn out and threadbare, and thus, if possible, to add my scot at least to the sum total of generally accepted reasons for holding fast to the classics in the schools.

There is no new thing under the sun, and what I have to say now cannot claim to be more than relatively novel or surprising. But I think that the view I am about to express on the subject of the study of the Latin language in its relation to early education is one which deserves more attention and consideration than it has hitherto received. The view I allude to touches our subject on the psychological side. Indeed it goes farther: it regards the matter from the standpoint of the physiological psychologist. It sees in the study of language in gen-

eral, and of Latin (and Greek) in particular, a distinct connection with the growth of the brain, that is, with the development of certain cerebral nerve-centres or areas of nerve-cells, which are concerned especially with thought and the expression of thought.

Let us, then, take note of what certain psychologists tell us about language study in its relation to the brain, and see, if we can, how their dicta bear upon our problem. It seems to be the opinion of those psychologists who devote themselves to the physiological aspect of their subject that between the eighth and thirteenth years of the child's life the study of language, while not excluding other studies, should at least take precedence of all other mental disciplines. This opinion is based on experiments made upon the human brain itself, and pointing to a high degree of potentiality as characteristic of the discipline in question, when the latter is regarded as a means of cerebral excitation and expansion. One of the exponents of this school of psychology is Doctor M P Jacobi, by whom the matter has been set forth, in its psycho-physiological aspect, in a lengthy and abstrusely worded article published in the American Journal of Psychology, for November, 1888.

Doctor Jacobi says that the process of acquiring a language is the highest of all the physiological processes which distinguish man from the lower animals, and that the educational results of such study are primarily a physiological problem, which ought to be settled by the physiologist before it falls into the hands of the pedagogue. Now, however vague and misty this statement may seem to us, teachers, yet nobody will deny that the growth of the mind is somehow connected with and probably conditioned by the development of the brain. The exact importance of this truth to education can be inferred only from an investigation of its details. What the details are it is for the physiological psychologists to determine. If these investigators find scientific reason to believe that language study is more effective than other disciplines, as an aid to the development of the brain of the school boy, we are bound to respect their conclusions. But this is the very claim that is made by the physiologists, whose views are expounded in the article just referred to, and among whom may be counted such eminent authorities as the two Jacobis, President G Stanley Hall, Dr Allen Starr, and others. "Speech", says Dr M P Jacobi, "implies a more extensive excitation of the brain than does any action performed without speech, including in the latter the systematized thinking [itself] which [eventually] clothes itself in words".

Of course, we know very well that much mental action precedes the use of words, whether in the child or the adult. The first conscious mental act of the infant is the acquisition of sense-perceptions, or impressions of external objects, made upon the brain through the medium of the organs of sense; and if we are logical in our method of education we train the child to handle these sense-impressions before we give him systematic instruction in the use of language. Hence the kindergarten system. But

there is a time of life (say somewhere between the sixth year and the eighth) when to the hitherto casual and unsystematic acquisition of the mother tongue there must be added the regular language study of the school. From this time on until the age of fourteen at least, the subject of language should be of paramount importance, for the reason that "to learn the name of a thing and how to use the name occasions much more cerebral activity and consequent mental development than can possibly result from the mere acquisition of sense-perceptions about the thing." Again, the use of words to indicate things perceived is the cause of activity in certain parts of the brain that are only slightly involved, if at all, in the act of acquiring a simple knowledge of the things themselves. Let us see how this is. A child has experienced the satisfaction arising from looking at and handling a certain toy. A visual impression of the toy has been registered in a certain part of the brain, a part known to and defined by the physiologists. At the same time, in another part of the brain, equally well known and defined, an impression has been made by the vibration of the nerve which connects the brain with the organ of hearing. This vibration has been caused by the sound of the voice of some person who utters the name of the toy. Two different parts of the brain have received impressions. One part has registered certain qualities of the toy; the other has registered its name—for the name is not a quality of the toy. The next step in the process is the act of combining these two sense-impressions—an act that involves an excitation of the brain cells, still more widely spread over the cerebral area than anything which has yet taken place, for the product of the combination is registered in a quarter quite separate and apart from either of the regions just mentioned. This extra-sensory quarter of the brain is of the highest importance to our present discussion, for on its proper development depends man's power not only to think, but also to express his thoughts in language. It is known as the concept centres. Thus far the thing registered there is only a sense-impression united with its name; it has been called a percept. The percept represents an individual toy whose name is united with it in the child's consciousness. But an act of generalization follows almost immediately in the same cerebral locality, at the moment when the child compares the toy with other toys. The name of the toy is then transferred to the product of this act of generalization; the product itself is an abstract idea. This abstract idea is called a concept, and is intimately associated with that group of brain cells which we have called the concept centres. Accordingly the concept centres are the seat of those cerebral activities which are aroused when any real thinking is to be done, and the development of this area of the brain is inseparably connected with the use of language.

I might go farther and tell you how I have watched the process of abstraction and generalization, unconsciously working in the mind of a child two and a half years of age; but my object is only to state the fact, in the hope that the importance of language study may be emphasized for the purposes of this discussion. If we can rest an argument for language, as a subject to be preferred to all others in the school curriculum,—if we can rest such an argument on a physiological as well as on a purely mental basis, and if in the same manner we can reinforce

our conviction that Latin, regarded as an instrument of training, possesses greater virtue than other European tongues, we shall have something additional to lean on when, as persistent classicists, we are assailed by *quidam physicae rationis peritissimi qui, ut ait Terentius, nonnumquam "faciunt intellegendo ut nihil intellegant"*.

The cerebral processes just described are necessarily rendered more complicated and subtle by the acquisition of other languages, in addition to the mother tongue. The nervous tissue of which the brain is composed is made up of a countless number of microscopic cells. These cells are traversed by delicate fibres, by whose means separate territories of cells become grouped, and it is because of the possibility of infinite variety in these groupings, says Jacobi, that the possibilities of speech are practically infinite. For example, if an object be successively indicated by two names, say the English 'man' and the Latin 'homo', we must infer that two groups of nerve cells receive the one and the other of the two auditory impressions. If the two names are very dissimilar, the two groups of nerve cells affected will be relatively far apart. If the names are alike, the groups of cells receiving the two impressions will be correspondingly close together. Hence the study of a foreign tongue, if carried on at the same time with that of the native speech, affects a larger area of nerve cells than the study of the vernacular alone would do, and the extent of brain area thus excited will bear some proportion to the structural differences between the two languages. For example, the difference between English or French or even German on the one hand, and either Latin or Greek on the other, is of so marked a nature as to induce an almost "radical change in the general synthesis of cerebral activity", when the pupil passes in consciousness from the modern language to the ancient. The change is far less radical when the pupil's mind is concerned with two modern languages. But the more radical the change (within given limits) the more favorable is the exercise to cerebral growth and expansion.

Again, the closer the kinship between any two languages the more delicate is the mental process involved in differentiating their elements. Such words as the English 'man' and the German 'mann', if coupled in consciousness, though they induce a less extended activity of brain cells than e.g. the English 'man' and the French 'homme' would do, yet they make necessary a greater delicacy of differentiation than do the two words which are less nearly related. The value of foreign languages to early education is dependent therefore, in part at least, both on their diversity of structure and on their similarity in this regard. Of first importance to our present theme is their diversity, which, if we take English as our starting point, may be said to increase as we travel in the direction of antiquity. Of secondary interest is their similarity, which becomes more marked as we limit our view to the languages of our own day. At the outset of the child's training the broadest differences are to be desired. Later on, the more delicate process of differentiating closely related forms tends to refine the results of the broader training which precedes. Surely no argument more logical than this can be adduced for giving preference in the curriculum to the ancient languages, if the question of precedence in time be raised between them and the modern tongues.